The Precious and the Vil(l)e:
Amorous Hallucinations of Nature in Ronsard's Petrarchist poetics

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Abstract This article examines the meaning of the word 'vile' by investigating how it is opposed to what is 'precious'. The 'precious'/'vile' contrast dates back at least as far as early translations of Jeremiah, and resurfaces in Augustine's reading of Genesis in the *Confessions*, and its presence in early modern French culture may be explained therefrom. But another powerful source is Petrarch's *Canzone* 129, a rewrite of *Canzone* 35, which similarly probingly analyses solitary consciousness. 129 internalises the contrast of 'precious' with 'vile' as a way of scrutinising individual goodness after the Fall. The article sees how this operates within the poem's wider thematic networks of desire and hallucination: the face of the beloved Laura is seen everywhere in the natural landscape. It then examines the poems by Ronsard that have been most clearly and explicitly influenced by *Canzone* 129 (and 35), namely *Cassandre* 28 and 126, *Nouvelle continuation* 35, and *Helene* 19. The homophonic word 'ville' in the last poem is seen as a kind of etymological and semantic bridge, looking back by silently echoing Petrarchan nuance of interiorised guilt and desire, and looking forward to the word's urban connotation – 'vilain' as town-dweller – noted by Cotgrave.

Keywords 'vile', Petrarch, Augustine, Jeremiah, Ronsard, narcissism, hallucination

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Introduction

This two-part essay seeks to trace 'deep structures' in Renaissance imitative procedure. The first part examines a passage from Petrarch's *Canzone* 129, where the poet asks, despite his own sense that he is 'vile', he may nonetheless be 'precious' to someone else. The wording here strongly recollects a passage from Augustine's *Confessions* book 13, an exegetical reading of God's creation of the universe in book 1 of Genesis. Citing itself a passage from the book of Jeremiah, Augustine seems to use the act of distinguishing the 'precious' from the 'vile' as an allegory for God's originary acts of separation, like light from dark, land from water, or life from void, and for the way divine prophecy is delivered and ideally understood by its recipient. Petrarch's poet, however, struggles to live up to this ideal, succumbing to the 'dolce error' of hallucinating his idealized lady in the natural landscape: a narcissistic refusal of the 'precious' truth of creation. The second part of this essay reads four Ronsardian imitations of *Canzone* 129, a poem which preoccupied him over his career, to see if his ambivalent relationship with this poetic model, his 'anxiety of influence', so to speak, overlaps with the Augustinian critique of Petrarch's vile (mis)readings of the divine.

The Precious and the Vile: Petrarch's *Canzone* 129

'Vil(e)' is an infrequent but not outlandishly rare adjective in Petrarch's *Canzoniere.* It denotes thoughts purified in the poet by Laura's physical or imagined presence (poem 85); material and

worldly ambitions felt by others, for example in the Avignon papacy (poems 7, 24, 114, 263); sexual desire ('vil voglia', poem 154); and a more general confusion caused and figured by the lady's loss ('nebbia oscura et vile', poem 270). More generally it expresses valuelessness (360). Near the end of the final poem, 366, it pertains to the mortal, faithless humanity the poet feels himself wretchedly to embody and begs the Virgin Mary to cleanse ('mio stato assai misero et vile'). I select its use in *Canzone* 129 ('Di pensier in pensier') for special study, however, for it stands at a kind of poetic, imitative crossroads, bridging ancient and Renaissance understandings of the 'vile'. In many ways, 129 rewrites the even more well-known *Canzone* 35, ('Solo e pensoso i più deserti campi') by likewise situating the poet in an isolated natural context, and like *Canzoni* 78 and 128, 129 sets 'vile' in a near-collocational oppositional pairing with 'caro' ('precious', 'dear'). This collocation echoes Jeremiah, Jerome and Augustine, as I go on to argue. But, unlike 78 and 128, 129, 'Petrarch's most expansive poem about the compensatory power of the erotic imagination', offers a more demonstrably sustained influence on Ronsard's poetry, as well as a richer poetic and contextual use for this 'caro-vile' opposition.[1] This opposition occurs in the second stanza of six.

Per alti monti et per selve aspre trovo
qualche riposo: ogni habitato loco
è nemico mortal degli occhi miei.
A ciascun passo nasce un penser novo
de la mia donna, che sovente in gioco
gira 'l tormento ch'i'
et a pena vorrei
cangiar questo mio viver dolce amaro,
ch'i'dico: Forse anchor ti serva Amore
ad un tempo migliore:
forse, a *te stesso vile, altrui se' caro.*
Et in questa trapasso sospirando:
Or porrebbe esser vero? or come? or quando?

[1] Gordon Braden, *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p.94.

Among high mountains and through harsh woods I find some rest; every inhabited place is a mortal enemy of my eyes. With every step is born a new thought of my lady, which often turns to pleasure the torment that I bear for her; and I would hardly wish to change this bitter, sweet life of mine, for I say: 'Perhaps Love keeps you for a better time; perhaps, *though vile to yourself, you are dear to someone else.*" and I go over to this thought, sighing: 'Now could it be true? But how? But when?'[2]

This passage, where the 'vile' is mentioned, occurs at a key moment. Almost precisely third of the way through (lines 24-26 of 72), it signals a transition from movement to stillness. As announced by the step-like rhythms of the poem's first words, the opening two stanzas draw repeated analogies between loving, thinking about the beloved, and motion. Love 'guides' the poet through the landscape (line 1). This is affirmed by lines 17-18 ('A ciascun passo nasce un penser novo / de la mia donna') and, more figuratively, by descriptions of agitation, e.g. the dense fluttering of verbs in line 8, ('or ride, or piange, or teme, or s'assecura') or the lover's burning emotional state 'Questi arde, et di suo stato è incerto' (13). In the next two stanzas, however, ideas of stasis tend to predominate. Immediately after the passage cited, the poet talks rather of moments when he stays still ('talor *m'arresta'*, 28, my italics), and the verbs correspondingly grow more descriptive and contemplative: 'disegno' (29), 'mirar' (35, 59), 'oubliar' (35), 'appaga' (38).

This narrative sequence, which first sees the poet walking through the landscape and thinking of his lady, then asking if he could be precious to another despite his own feelings of vileness, and then to still contemplation of the landscape, represent variations on a central theme: the porous susceptibility of the poet-lover's consciousness to outside influence, other voices. The context, where the narrator's troubled soul 'alma sbigotta' (6) 'follows' his imagined Lady where she leads, ('segue ov'ella il mena', 9), and where each new step elicits a new thought of her,

[2] Robert Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems, The Rime Sparse and other Lyrics* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1976), p.264.

obscures the precise source and ownership of the poet's thoughts about his own vileness and the hope he might be precious to her. To what degree is the voice asking these questions not quite the poet's own, but a hopefully fantasised and ventriloquized projection of his lady's? They are after all immediately followed by an urgent, immediate, confused flurry of further questions ('or come? or quando?'), as if the poet's more personal voice returns suddenly afterwards.

The sense that the poet is somehow 'possessed' by his lady is accentuated by the poet's detailed description of the natural landscape, facilitated by his newly immobile vantage point. This description soon offers a strange variation on the commonplace of the *locus amoenus*, or the idea that nature is sympathetic to the melancholic lover's complaint. In the first stanza the poet's soul is calmed by the 'rivo' 'fonte', 'poggi', 'ombrosa valle' (4-5), 'alti monti' and 'selve aspre' (14). But soon after his doubts and hopes about vileness and preciousness, he notices with increasing frequency and intensity his lady's fantasised presence. At the start of the third stanza he draws her lovely face ('suo bel viso') with his mind ('disegno con el mente') in the first rock he sees ('primo sasso') (28-9, order inverted). In the fourth, he confesses, even though he knows it's unbelievable '(or chi fia che mi creda?)' that he has seen her 'alive' ('vive') often in clear water ('acqua chiara'), green grass ('erbe verde'), a beech tree-trunk ('tronchon d'un faggio') and a white cloud ('bianca nube') (41-3).

Petrarch's poem's treatment of consciousness, creativity, voice, and landscape, as related to questions of the 'precious' and the 'vile', recall a passage from the closing book 13 of St Augustine's *Confessions,* part of Augustine's exegetical reading of the book of Genesis 1. Petrarch's Augustinian influence is of course vast. Pierre de Nolhac counts 1200 citations from Augustine in Petrarch's Latin works; Petrarch carries his copy of the *Confessions* to the peak of Mont Ventoux; it is Augustine who admonishes Petrarch in the *Secretum*.[3] Here, however, Petrarch seems specifically to echo Augustine's interpretation of Genesis 1.20: *Producant aquæ reptile animæ viventis, et volatile super terram sub firmamento cæli* (Vulgate) 'Let the waters

[3] See Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's Metamorphoses: Text and Subtext in the* Rime Sparse (University of Missouri Press, 1985), pp. 95-6.

produce reptiles of living souls [and birds that fly above the earth and below the firmament of the sky]'. Augustine reads the 'reptiles' and birds, in a broadly allegorical way, as signs of baptism, holy works and divine speech. For him 'reptiles', or 'creeping, crawling animals' (OED *n*.1.1) signify 'the works of your holy people, God'.[4] This is because 'your mysteries have *crept* [*repserunt*] through the midst of the world's temptations to imbue the nations with your name through your baptism' and 'great and wonderful things have been made like vast sea monsters [*ceti*]' (*ibid,* my italics). Birds and 'flying creatures' [*volatile,* Genesis 1.21] are, correspondingly, 'voices of your messengers flying above the earth close to the firmament of your book; for this is the authority under which they have to fly, wherever they may go' (*ibid*). Referring then to Genesis 1.22 *Crescite, et multiplicamini,* ('Be fruitful and multiply'), Augustine concludes: 'there are neither languages nor discourses in which their voices [i.e. of the reptile-like 'holy people' and bird-like 'messengers'] are not heard. Their sound is gone out into all the world, and their words to the ends of the earth because you, Lord, have blessed and multiplied these things' (*ibid*).

Petrarch's internalization of the lady's idealized voice as silent speech in his mind, and his projection of her face onto the natural landscape, thus shares with Augustine preoccupations of how the created world of rivers, rocks and tree-trunks, or birds, whales, reptiles and animals, may signify the divine. These thematic affinities are signaled and supported by Petrarch's use of the 'precious'/ 'vile' opposition. Augustine quotes loosely Jeremiah 15.19 'As you separate the precious from the vile, you become the mouth of God' (*ibid*). The allusion refers specifically at first to God's act of separating out the 'precious' animals from the 'vile' waters, but also implicitly extends to the rest of the ensuing passage's discussion of divine voice: not only God's commands as directly quoted in Genesis, but also these commands as relayed by the reptile-like holy people and the bird-like messengers. Augustine's quotation of Jeremiah 15.19 immediately signals these complex meditations on the 'precious' divinity of divine speech. The Vulgate, and 1535 Geneva French, translations of the original Hebrew verse run as follows:

[4] Augustine, *Confessions*, tr. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press [1991] 1998), p.278.

propter hoc haec dicit Dominus si converteris convertam te et ante faciem mea stabis et si separaveris pretiosum a vili quasi os meum eris convertentur ipsi ad te et tu non converteris ad eos.

Pour ce que le Seigneur dit ainsi: si tu te convertis je te feray retourner / affin q[ue] tu assiste devant moy: & si tu separes la chose precieuse de la vile / tu feras comme ma bouche. Ils se retourneroit a toy mais tu ne retourneras pas a eulx.[5]

Augustine therefore does something quite radical with the verse from Jeremiah. He expands it by transferring it from contexts of divine prophecy and conversion (a verb Jerome's translation repeats with conspicuous frequency), to the genesis of nature and the animals. In Augustine's reading the separation of the precious and the vile thus keys into well-established analogies of the World and the Book: nature and the Bible as God's twinned and intertwining creations. Whereas Jeremiah ideally would become '*comme* ma bouche' [i.e. celle de Dieu] and prophesize aright were he hypothetically perfectly to separate the precious from the vile, God (logically enough) *is* his own mouth [*estis*] in the very act of performing such a separation, which in this context implicitly suggests that of earth from void (Genesis 1.2), light from darkness (Genesis 1.4), birds and reptiles from the waters (1.20) or beasts from the earth (1.22, 1.24). Thus, quoting the precious/vile dichotomy from Jeremiah strengthens for Augustine prophecy's and creation's analogical links with each other.

Such analogies silently call into question the nature of divine communication, either from God to his prophets, or from His prophets (bird-like 'messengers' and reptile-like 'holy people') to the as-yet unconverted. The emergence of the reptiles and the beasts from the waters in Genesis 1.20 in Augustine signifies the emergence of the cleansed and converted Christian from the baptismal water. This seems relatively straightforward; but Augustine's wording 'imbuendas

[5] *La Bible, qui est toute la Sainte Escriture En laquelle sont contenus le Vieil Testament et le Nouveau, traduisez en francoyse* http://www.e-rara.ch/gep_g/content/titleinfo/1751440 [accessed 29 March 2016].

gentes nomine tuo in baptismo tuo' stresses how baptism invests created matter – water – with the 'name' that mortals can only predominantly envisage immaterially, i.e. as a verbal sign. The implication is that the baptized, converted Christian, *qua* Christian, must somehow use the material and the immaterial sign in conjunction, in order to retain the precious, and to lose the vile, in both. The holiness of sacramental symbols thus perhaps depends less on *what* they mean than *how* they mean; the way they may elicit in their recipient an ability to make such god-like distinctions. As the verse from Jeremiah makes clear, the prophet can only relay the word of God once s/he has become like His mouth, once s/he has winnowed the precious from the vile.

After this brief excursus into its Augustinian and Biblical subtexts, we can return to how in Canzone 129 the poet's struggle to cope with his own sense of vileness, and his hope that he is precious to his beloved, relates to his imaginative projections on to the natural world. Sara Sturm-Maddox reads Laura's apparition in rivers, rocks, tree-trunks and clouds as examples of delusional *phantasmata*, hallucinations relating to Andreas Capellanus's warning that love is madness ('amor est passio'), or *delectatio cogitationis*, an obsessional visual fixation which, sufferers fear, may stamp visual images indelibly on the mind. The Augustinian subtext here, signaled by the prominent position in 129 of the precious-vile dichotomy, develops the sense that the poem takes seriously the acutely personal ethical challenges involved in perceiving the natural world as a divine sign or set of signs. The Petrarchan poet is repeatedly disturbed by the fantasised projections of Laura's beauty onto the landscape, even as he is entranced. The word 'error' is repeated three times, albeit each time in antithetically positive terms: the 'error' appeases his soul (37), he wills it to last (39), and calls it 'dolce error' (50). The idea that eroticized visions reflect pleasurably but sinfully back to their observer, together with recurrent images of water (e.g. 'rivo' 4, 'acqua' 41, 'ruscel' 68), themes of self-forgetting 'oblio' (29-31, 38) or self-division (31,72), and the implied fear at Augustinian rebuke, recall strongly a central passage from Petrarch's *Secretum*, where Augustine sternly warns: 'Does not the story of Narcissus terrify you? And does not a manly consideration of the foulness of the body remind you what you are inwardly? Content with gazing only at the exterior skin, you do not extend the

eyes of the mind beyond that'.[6] The poet's fantasies of Laura occur in and are enabled by the shade ('Ove porge *ombra* un pino alto od un colle…', 27), an echo of Ovid's Narcissus fallacious love for his own, similarly reflective and eroticised shade-like reflection or '*umbra*'.[7] The powerfully personal internalization of Augustine's precious-vile dichotomy strengthens the motif of narcissism yet further: the poet he thinks *he* is vile; he hopes his lady thinks *him* precious.

Canzone 129, then, subtly relates the Augustinian allegorical link of God's divine genesis with Christian, even prophetic interpretations of created nature – both involve distinguishing the precious from the vile – with a specifically narcissistic, or Narcissus-like, risk of misreading that nature. Petrarch's poet's perhaps delusional *phantasmata* of Laura in rivers, rocks and trees parallel an argument with Augustine in the *Secretum*. Franciscus argues that he owes to Laura his 'modest name and glory', that '[i]t was she who beckoned my youthful soul away from everything base', that his love is divine, for Laura's spirit alone, protesting 'why should I not be transformed into the pattern of the character that I loved?'. Augustine counters that Laura only elicits love of earthly glory, as a poet, that he fell away from a youthful state of bliss from the very moment he saw her, and that he should not love the created being but the creator.[8] The idea that love for created, mortal beings is but a sign for or step towards more divine love is consistent with the Plotinian Christian Platonism of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana,* where he reads *caritas* as 'the motion of the spirit toward loving God for His own sake and towards loving one's fellow creature because of God'.[9]

The Augustinian, Christian-Platonic subtext thus informs the Petarch-poet's concern in *Canzone* 129 about his visions of Laura in the natural landscape. For Augustine, it may be

[6] Quoted in Gur Zak, 'A Humanist in Exile: Ovid's Myth of Narcissus and the Experience of Self in Petrarch's *Secretum*' in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* ed. by Alison Keith and Stephen Rupp (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2007), pp. 179-98, p.190.
[7] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 3.434, my italics.
[8] See Zak, 187 and Dennis Dutschke, 'The Anniversary Poems in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*' in *Italia,* Vol. 58, No. 2, pp.83-101, p.100.
[9] Quoted in Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's Metamorphoses,* p.103.

inferred, such visions would effectively be a *phantasma* of a *phantasma:* the image of a Laura who even in physical 'reality' is only the 'vile', mortal creation of her 'precious', eternal, divine creator. This double distance is another echo of Ovid's Narcissus, who loves but the 'shadow of a reflected image' ('*imaginis umbra*' 3.484). The Augustinian/Ovidian subtext also helps explain the poet's urgent bewilderment about his possible 'preciousness' to Laura. Lurking in the rapid rhetorical questions about how or when such 'preciousness' could occur ('Or porrebe esser vero? or come? or quando?') are complex theological issues: how exactly can the 'precious' divinity of the creator be read into a 'vile', postlapsarian natural world? And, is the poet not in some way inescapably vile in some way simply by virtue of being a mortal creature oneself? Therefore, should vileness not somehow be acknowledged, even praised, so as not to rival God pridefully or presumptuously? While the poet envisages Laura's love for him, he never suggests this love could cure his own sense of vileness: whether or not he is precious to Laura, he presumably will remain vile to himself.

The intricate problems of how a mortal is to see the 'precious' creator in the 'vile' postlapsarian world, and how sexual desire for another mortal creature may be legitimated in such a world, help explain the poem's climactic crisis or nadir.

> Poi quando il vero sgombra
> quel dolce error, pur lí medesmo assido
> me freddo, pietra morta in pietra viva,
> in guisa d' uom che pensi et pianga et scriva (50-52).

Then, when the truth dispels that sweet deception, right there in the same place I sit down, cold, a dead stone on the living rock, like a man who thinks and weeps and writes.[10]

[10] Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, p.266.

Even when, perhaps because, the ‘dolce error’ is dispelled, the poet suffers a kind of cold trance (‘freddo’ ‘pietra morta in pietra viva’): it is as if the contradictory readings are too much for the poet’s rational, cognitive or interpretative faculty (‘mente’, 34) to take; he seems to break down in the face of near-impossible responsibility. He is only in the guise or form (‘in guisa’) of a person who thinks, cries and writes; he acts merely as a kind of automaton. The closing verb ‘scriva’ implies this poem itself is being written in this trance-like state, a meta-poetic variation on the poem’s preoccupation with the precise source and ownership of what are ostensibly one’s own thoughts. The final stanza concludes the poem by accentuating this relation between poetic self-awareness and psychological self-division. Distanced from the others by being uniquely only seven lines long, it addresses the preceding ‘canzone’ as an autonomous, personified artifact, who can ‘see’ its own creator set off once more to a running stream (‘ruscel corrente’, 83). This return to the narcissistic ‘dolce error’ conveys an overall sense of cyclical aimlessness, as though Augustine’s questions will never be answered. This circularity marks the poem’s larger-scale symmetries. The poet walks (1-26), stands still (27-52), then walks again (53-72); the self-interrogation about preciousness and vileness (24) recurs in broadly similar terms towards the end (63-4). The mirror-like effects of these cyclical symmetries culminate in the poet’s concluding twist that he himself is but an image or reflection: his heart has been displaced to the dreamt visions of his love (‘Ivi è 'l mio cor, et quella che 'l m' invola; / qui veder pôi l' imagine mia sola.’ 71-2). The poet implies by closing his poem this way that some form of narcissistic, self-enclosed flight into *phantasma* must result when mere mortals are forced to read God’s creation, especially the physical body of a beautiful beloved. The god-like task of separating the precious from the vile is simply too much. And the poem’s increasingly powerful meta-poetic element, like the closing echoes of Laura’s name and laurel-scented breeze of earthly poetic glory (‘ove *l’aura* si sente / d’un fresco et oderifero *laureto*’ 69-70, my italics) similarly compel its reader to see this poem as a comparable challenge to interpretation. If the poet, as he says, swaps conventional hierarchies by saying he is only his own image, then perhaps his poem-‘pensier’ is for its reader a temptingly dangerous near-reality.

Knowing the subtext from the *Confessions* thus helps establish the structural and thematic importance of the poet’s self-questioning about the ‘precious’ and the ‘vile’. Even though it is

impossible ultimately to prove if Petrarch's echoes of Augustine and Jeremiah in *Canzone* 129 are conscious or merely coincidental, consideration of such matters helps inform and enrich understanding of the poem's engagements with nature, consciousness, interpretation, prophesy and the divine word. I propose in the second half of this essay an analogous methodology and procedure when examining the stance, or variety of stances, Ronsard's poetry could take towards Petrarchan models. Contemporaries like Étienne Jodelle pointed out that Ronsard often imitated Petrarch closely and affectionately; but he could also be quite antagonistic to the Tuscan sonneteer. The 1550 *Préface* to the *Odes* dismisses '[ces] courtizans, qui n'admirent qu'un petit sonnet petrarquizé', while the 1556 '*Élégie à son livre*' scoffs '[Pétrarque] estoit un grand fat d'aimer sans avoir rien'.[11] This survey of imitations of *Canzone* 129 therefore sees how this ambivalent attitude applies to the Petrarch-poet's hallucinations of the beloved to the natural world, to see if Ronsard, like Augustine, deems them 'vile'.[12] The word 'vile' itself is absent from these poems, or concealed in wordplay, but the subtexts of *Canzone* 129, which preoccupied Ronsard throughout his career, may awaken subtly theological connotations of word-choice and tone.

Ronsardian projections of *Canzone* 129

Poem 28 from *Cassandre* takes up from Petrarch's *Canzone* 129 the theme of the poet projecting visions of his beloved into the natural world.

> Injuste amour, fuzil de toute rage,
> Que peult un cuœur soubmis à ton pouvoyr,
> Quand il te plaist par les sens esmouvoyr

[11] See Ronsard, *Œuvres Complètes*, ed by J. Céard, D. Ménanger and M. Simonin (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1993) Vol.I, pp.168-9.
[12] Ronsard's imitations of 129, especially in the poems surveyed here, intertwine inseparably with those of the very similar *Canzone* 35. The ways in which Ronsard silently aligns, juxtaposes and intermingles these sources could be a valuable basis for further study.

Nostre raison qui preside au courage?

Je ne voy pré, fleur, antre, ny rivage,
Champ, roc, ny boys, ny flotz dedans le Loyr,
Que, peinte en eulx, il ne me semble voyr
Ceste beauté qui me tient en servage

Ores en forme, ou d'un foudre enflammé,
Ou d'une nef ou d'un Tigre affamé,
Amour la nuict devant mes yeulx la guide:

Mais quand mon bras en songe les poursuit,
Le feu, la nef, & le Tigre s'enfuit,
Et pour le vray je ne pren que le vuide.

The main point of imitative connection is the second quatrain, which, as Henri Weber notes, follows lines 40-43 from Petrarch's poem quite closely.[13] As Petrarch's poet sees Laura's face in clear water, green grass, beech trunk, and white cloud, so Ronsard's poet sees Cassandra's in fields, flowers, riverbanks, fields, rocks, woods, and waves in the Loire (5-6). While amplifying the number and range of Petrarchan examples so much might suggest parody, this rapid listing also conveys a sense of frenzied obsession, affirming the frustrations in the first quatrain: 'raison' has been 'ém[u]' (3); his 'courage' has taken over. 'Courage', clearly playing on its etymological root of the 'cœur', pertains to feelings, passions, and sexual desire; the poet's protestation that reason should 'preside' over it obviously alludes to commonplace neo-platonic oppositions of reason versus passion. Another neo-platonic strand, however, relates such 'courage' or passion to poetic creativity. With notably fiery imagery, Love is the 'touchstone' (fuzil) for 'rage'; the implicit allusion to the platonic 'rage' of poetic inspiration (*fureur poeticus*) is strengthened when the poet says the lady's beauty is creatively 'painted' into the natural world. 'Peinte' is a relatively straightforward verbal echo of *Canzone* 129's 'desegno', where the poet, asking if he is precious to his lady despite his own sense of vileness, 'draws' her face onto the first stone he sees, as if perhaps to evaluate or regain a sense of self-love. And, like Petrarch,

[13] Pierre de Ronsard, *Les Amours*, ed. by H. and C. Weber (Paris, Classiques Garnier, 1963), p. 517, footnote 3.

Ronsard works to bring the reader intimately into this ragingly creative consciousness. His sudden shift from day to night in the first tercet with the first word ‘ores’ (maintenant) immediately plunges the reader into the real-time of his hallucinatory experience: he sees her beauty now in the shape of fiery lightning, a ship (amended in 1584 edition to a ‘torrent’), and even a famished tiger! (9-11)

While Ronsard’s imitation of Petrarch might again tilt towards parodic exaggeration, but it does stress the sheer power Love has, via ‘les sens’ to strengthen ‘[le] courage’ and weaken ‘[n]ostre raison’. The focus on the deludedly eroticized senses clearly recollects not only *Canzone* 129 but also the dialogue between Augustine and Petrarch in the *Secretum*. The Augustinian subtext of the more apparent Petrarchan subtext may help us re-read the way Ronsard’s poet consistently criticizes and disavows his own actions. Whereas in *Canzone* 129 Love guides the poet (‘mi guida Amor’), in Ronsard’s poem ‘Amour’ guides instead visions of the beloved past the poet’s passive gaze (11). The senses through which Love passes are expressed in general, not personal terms ‘les sens’ (not ‘*mes* sens’) (3). Even his attempts to grab the visions of the beloved at night are heavily qualified (‘mon bras *en songe* les poursuit’) (11). As if frightened of something like Augustine’s warning to Petrarch about Narcissus’s vilely erotic misreading of nature, Ronsard’s poet paradoxically strives despite himself to seal himself away from the ‘servage’ of love, blaming everyone and everything except himself. In this, one form of narcissism seems to replace another. Unlike Petrarch’s frequent allusions to Laura’s ‘bel viso’, or the loving intermingling of his poetic voice with hers, Cassandre’s beauty is attacked, not praised. With this in mind, the alliterative opposition of ‘vray’ and ‘vuide’ that closes the poem does not only suggest that even in dream he fails to grasp the fleeing visions; it also implies that even were he to grasp them, they would still only be ‘vuide[s]’ because they are nothing but ‘songes’. Ronsard’s haughty stance towards his own ‘vile’, hallucinated ‘servage’ resembles Augustine’s.

While the Petrarchan influence on Sonnet 28 was predominantly localized to the second quatrain, and then taken in new, nocturnal directions, Sonnet 126 of *Les Amours de Cassandre* (119 in the Weber edition) disperses the influence throughout the poem, starting with depictions of the natural world and transferring the sense of poetically created hallucination towards the sestets and climax.

Je te hay, people, & m'en sert de tesmoing,
Le Loyr, Gastine, & les rives de Braye,
Et la Neuffaune, & l'humide saulaye,
Qui de Sabut borne l'extreme coin.

Quand je me perdz entre deux montz bien loing,
M'arraisonnant seul à l'heure j'essaye
De soulager la douleur de ma playe,
Qu'Amour encherne au plus vif de mon soing.

Là pas à pas, Dame, je rememore
Ton front, ta bouche, & les graces encore
De tes beaulx yeulx trop fidelles archers:

Puis figurant ta belle idole feinte
Dedans quelque eau, je sanglote une plainte,
Qui fait gemir le plus dur des rochers.

The opening quatrain juxtaposes a fairly banal Horatian tag (odi profanum vulgus) with a powerful sense of geographical locale, even naming a copse ('Neuffaine') in Ronsard's house and identifying the willow trees growing around the foot of the 'Sabut' hill. This acute, detailed familiarity with the landscape initially relays a sense of refuge and escape. As the poem develops, however, we see the list in retrospect as a kind of shorthand for the poet's movement through this landscape, as if busily trying to escape the 'peuple' he so 'hates' (1). It is not until he arrives at the start of the second quatrain between two anonymous 'montz' – the echo of 'di

monte in monte' is clear – that he can finally try to cure himself of love's wound (5). Overlapping with this mini-story is another, where the poet undergoes a step-like progression of cognitive processes to help him with this cure: from 'arraisonner' (6) to 'rememorer' (9) to 'figurer' (12). The sequence is affirmed by conjunctions like 'puis' (12), suggesting that one activity leads to the next. Given this context it seems the description of love's wound, as that which 'Amour encherne au plus vif de mon soing' (8) has emerged as a result from the first process, 'arraisonner', glossed by Weber as 's'entretenir avec soi-même'.[14] There is a clear resemblance here with the comparable passage in *Canzone* 129 (24-9), where the poet asks himself if his lady thinks him precious and if this may heal his own sense of vileness, and then turns to the natural world to guide his thoughts. Perhaps, then, Ronsard's uses 'encherner', rare variant of 'encharner' ('to flesh', Cotgrave), to increase the homophony with 'cher', 'caro': the word Petrarch uses to denote the anti-vile. If so, then Ronsard brings together in a single, painful verb the perceived preciousness of the mortal beloved, with the vile effects that her tempting flesh has on his.

Supporting this reading is the fact that the resemblance to *Canzone* 129 becomes progressively more evident: the first tercet clearly echoes its opening and fundamental theme in the context of 'rememoration'. With every step ('pas à pas' 9), Ronsard's sees a progressively clear picture of his beloved in memory: the 'vile' hallucination, narcissistic creation of his own misreading, gains in detail: 'ton front, ta bouche […] tes beaux yeux' (11). A knowledge of *Canzone* 129's Augustinian subtext thus modifies the tone and lends additional weight to key elements of this poem's last lines, like the verb 'figurer', the description of the 'idole feinte', the sobbed 'plainte', and the groaned, echoed response from the surrounding rocks. 'Figurer' now seems bitterer, more skeptical, as implied by its alliterative connection with mere feigning ('feinte'); likewise, 'idole' seems a stronger reminiscence of 'vile' Augustinian condemnation; and the groaning response of the rocks seems ironic: the poet seems dispiritedly to uphold the illusion that the blended fantasy of his lady and nature are sympathetic to him, despite himself, despite his broadly Augustinian convictions to the contrary.

[14] *Les Amours*, ed. by H. and C. Weber, p. 805.

The longest and most sustained Ronsardian engagement with the issues of erotic projection, narcissistic vileness and reading the natural world juxtaposed in *Canzone* 129 is perhaps poem 35 of the *Nouvelle Continuation des amours*. Like *Canzone* 129 poem 35 is a 'song' (entitled 'Chanson') and, again like *Canzone* 129, divided into three sections of roughly equal length. In *Canzone* 129 the poet first walks and considers his preciousness or vileness (1-26), then he stops to see if his fantasies of his lady may help him (27-52), and finally sets off again towards a mountain (53-72, including the final, shorter verse). Poem 35 starts lamenting the poet's sadness (1-36), then embarks on a long description of how he visualises his lady in different natural and cosmic phenomena, with eight four-line examples (37-32), and finally concludes with an attack on love as 'vrayement une maladie' (73-84). The second section is marked out quite clearly from the others because every four-line unit begins either with 'Si' (37, 41, 45, 61, 65) or 'Quand' (49, 53, 57). Ripening harvest fields are compared to the lady's hair (37-40), the moon to her eyebrow (45-8), the stars to her eyes (49-52), roses with her lip-colour (53-6), the flowers rising with the sun to the colour of her cheeks (57-60), the wild oak to her slender waist (61-64), and the sound of a rippling fountain to her voice (65-8). The one stanza referring to a man-made object, which likens a table 'applany proprement' to the lady's fine brow (41-4) is deleted in the 1578 and later editions. This disturbs the poem's structural balance of two 36-line units followed by a 12-line conclusion, but strengthens the overall pattern where the lady is seen only in natural or cosmic creations: creations which ultimately remain beyond human ken and so, Augustine might argue, demonstrate the 'preciousness' of God. The concluding stanza of this section functions as a kind of transition into the conclusion:

> Voila comment pour estre fantastique
> En cent façons ses beaultez j'apperçoy,
> Et m'esjouys d'estre melancolique
> Pour recevoir tant de formes en moy […] (69-72)

The ellipsis at the end of this section is set in square-brackets because it seems to be Weber's editorial insertion; the equivalent passage in the 1557 printed edition concludes only with a full stop. Some kind of pause or temporal break may seem necessary to make psychologically plausible the jump from boasting about creative imagination ('cent façons ses beaultez j'apperçoy') and joyful melancholia ('m'esjouys d'estre melancolique') to the serious concerns in the very next stanza about love being a 'maladie' (73). Unless, of course, such sudden mood-swings are part of the point. In subsequent revisions for 1567 and 1587 editions, the final verse attacks 'visions […] qui me fait vivre et mourir en soucy'. Alongside a broadly Augustinian concern about the perhaps joyous or 'dolce' 'error' of reading like a 'fantastique' one's 'vile' mortal desire into the divine 'preciousness' symbolized by nature are worries about *phantasma* as a genuine illness: 'Les medicins la sçavent bien juger, / L'appellant mal, fureur de fantasie' (74-5). Such concerns are recurrently and powerfully anticipated in the opening section, which is strenuously revised. The four-line *amplificatio* of Petrarch's poet seeing his Lady in a white cloud ('bianca nube') is preceded by a self-lacerating attack on his 'faulse imagination' strengthened for the 1584 edition with clearer reference to Ovid's Narcissus to 'fausse et vaine illusion' (18). Via the reference to Lucretius 4.438 about the fallacious appearance of broken oars in the water (26-8), Ronsard joins empirical to theological modes of scrutiny regarding eroticized natural projection.

The last Ronsardian engagement with *Canzone* 129 studied here is the latest to be published: *Sonnets pour Hèlène* 1.19.

> Je fuy les pas frayez du meschant populaire,
> Et les villes où sont les peuples amassez:
> Les rochers, les forests desja sçavent assez
> Quelle trampe a ma vie estrange et solitaire.
>
> Si ne suis-je seul, qu'Amour mon secrétaire
> N'accompagne mes pieds débiles & cassez:
> Qu'il ne conte mes maux & pressens & passez

A ceste voix sans corps, et qui rien ne scauroit taire.

Souvent plein de discours, pour flatter mon esmoy,
Je m'arreste, & je dy: Se pourroit-il bien faire
Qu'elle pensast, parlast, ou se souvint de moy?

Qu'a sa pitié mon mal commençast à desplaire?
Encor que je me trompe, abusé du contraire,
Pour me faire plaisir, Helene, je le croy.

Sara Sturm-Maddox argues much of this poem is 'practically identical' to passages in *Canzone* 129. There are, indeed, themes of solitude (1-2), the idea of Amour guiding the poet ('mon secrétaire', 5-6), a clearly-described but hazily-located landscape which shares an affective sympathy with the poet (1-4) and, more clearly than Ronsard's other poems surveyed here, the poet stopping and hoping doubtfully that he might be dear or precious to his beloved (10-11). The poet retains a guarded skepticism, seeming to believe his hope, and then not, from clause to clause: especially in the final tercet. The idea, moreover, that the poet's love is satisfied neither in the 'ville' nor in the countryside, figured by Echo ('cette voix sans corps, et qui rien ne scauroit taire'), lover of Narcissus and corollary in sound of Narcissus's empty visual reflexivity, hints not only at an Augustinian confusion as to the 'preciousness' of divinely created nature, but also connotations of the 'vile' in terms of rural/urban rivalry, subtly expressed in the homophony of 'ville', line 2.[15] This more specifically social sense of the word is brought out in Cotgrave, who observes: 'the Gentlemen of France tearme *villains* all Farmers, Husbandmen, Plowmen, and generally all yeomen, how free soever their condition, or tenures be: and that country Gentlemen tearme so all Citizens, Burghers, & Inhabitants of walled Townes' (*Vilain*, m.) Wondering fruitlessly from the vile 'ville', to the 'vile' countryside of deceptive rocks and forests, this 'gentilhomme Vendomois', frustrated in love with the *spirituelle* Helene, finds the 'vile', be it theological, social, or erotic, wherever he goes.

[15] Thanks to Wes Williams for alerting me to the potential wordplay in this poem.

Conclusion

This essay has sought implicitly and throughout to demonstrate problems involved in defining and delineating imitation in poetry. Every 'source' turns out to have its own source: Ronsard imitates Petrarch, who cites Augustine who, via Jeremiah, quotes the word of God. And thus it is never quite clear which prior writer or writers are being cited at any one time. Nor is the conscious assertiveness or deliberate recognisability of a particular allusion or reference an exact science. Despite Petrarch's clear interest in Augustine we cannot truly know whether he had the passage from the *Confessions* at the forefront of his mind as he was composing *Canzone* 129. But tracing such verbal correspondences can concretely enrich our understanding in the poem of the potential theological dimensions of the poet's 'error', in relation to his narcissistic agonies as solitary lover and ambitious laureate. As he repeats to himself in solitary thought his beloved's newly comforting and personal spin on the 'precious'/'vile' opposition, the word 'vile' seems to echo through different voices, minds, and spaces. Near-simultaneously, the poet's hallucinations of Laura probe his, and the natural world's, vile fallen-ness. How can nature be fallen if the poet beholds Laura's near-divinity everywhere therein? But, on the other hand, do such 'precious' visions become 'vile' the very moment this wretch conjures them up in his prideful, libidinal mind? Likewise, and while 'vile' does not occur lexically in Ronsard's imitations of *Canzone* 129, the (mis)reading of nature for which the word is a microcosmic Augustinian shorthand is clearly important throughout. Awareness of this subtext nuances subtly but powerfully nouns like 'songe' 'vuide' or 'idole', verbs like 'araisonner', 'rememorer' and 'figurer', and contrasting projections of rural and urban space: the 'vil(l)e'.

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